

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE KEDAH STATE LIBRARY
CORPORATION : ISMAIL HUSSEIN COLLECTION**

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ABSTRACT

The Kedah State Library Corporation aims to establish libraries in all the 11 districts in Kedah. Apart from serving the community, the Corporation also establishes special collections of local scholars. This article traces the setting-up of the Ismail Hussein Collection

Keywords: State library; Local collection; Kedah State Library Corporation; Ismail Hussein Collection

INTRODUCTION

Kedah, the northern most state of Malaysia is located immediately south of Thailand, has an area of 9,426 sq. km. Popularly known as the 'Rice Bowl of Malaysia', Kedah is Malaysia's biggest producer of paddy. The common sight in the state is vast tracts of paddy fields backed by undulating mountains. Kedah now has become another attractive haven for investors and there are hundreds of hectares of well-developed industrial land throughout the state. According to the 1980 census, Kedah has a population of 1,116,140. Presently, Kedah has 460 primary schools and 86 secondary schools with 275,000 students and 12,000 teachers. The country's sixth university, Universiti Utara Malaysia, is located in Kedah.

DEVELOPMENT AND PROGRESS OF THE KEDAH STATE LIBRARY CORPORATION

The history of the State Library dates back 38 years ago when a committee was formed to establish a public library service. But it was only in 1960 that the state government approved RM\$45,000 for the establishment of a state library. On 30th September 1961, H.R.H. the Sultan of Kedah officially opened the Alor Setar Public Library.

The rapid growth of the State Library began on 25 April 1972 when the State Legislative Assembly passed Enactment 7, 1972 which provided for a Kedah State

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Library Corporation to be formed. This Enactment came into effect on 1 January 1974 through a Government Gazette issued on 20 May 1976.

It has been the objective of the Kedah State Library Corporation to establish libraries in all the 11 districts in Kedah but due to financial constraints, this has not been achieved. However, the Corporation has established branches in Alor Setar, Sungai Petani, Kulim, Yan and Jitra. There are also over 200 service points.

The Alor Setar Public Library was opened on 1 September 1974 when the Corporation took over the library which was formerly run by the local town council. The total book volume is 46,979 and the total number of registered member is 27,200. The library is strategically located near a school, bus station and government offices. We were very fortunate in that the new Kedah State Library which also houses the Alor Setar branch was completed in early 1991.

The Sungai Petani Public Library was established on 27 November 1976. It was officially opened on 20 January 1977 by the Chief Minister. This library was formerly run by the Rotary Club and is currently centrally located in one of the more popular shopping complex. The total collection is 43,954 volumes with 17,588 registered members.

The Kulim Public Library was formerly a Government rest house which was renovated to function as a library. It is located near schools and residential areas. On 27 September 1979, the library was officially opened by the Chief Minister. The total collection is 29,515 volumes with 7,343 registered members.

The year 1980 is an important year in the history of the State Public Library because a newly built Yan Public Library was established costing RM\$55,000. This is the only public library which has a new building. Other branches were old buildings which were renovated to function as libraries. The Yan Public Library has a collection of 22,600 volumes with 4,058 registered members. The Jitra Public Library was opened in 1985. It has 1,709 registered members with a collection of 22,796 volumes.

Beside the five branches, the State Library Corporation is also actively providing services to various rural areas throughout the state via its four mobile units. Mobile unit 1 began operating in 1977 and provides services to the residents in North Kedah at schools, community halls and government departments. It has 23,221 registered members. Mobile unit 2 has 19,308 registered members and provides services to areas located in Central Kedah. Mobile unit 3 provides services to areas located in

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South Kedah and has 13,131 registered members. Mobile Unit 4 provides services to 18 small towns in North Kedah. It has 6,112 registered members.

THE ISMAIL HUSSEIN COLLECTION

In 1988, Tan Sri Prof. Emeritus Dato' (Dr) Pendeta Haji Ismail Hussein, a great Malay scholar, presented more than 10,000 items to the state government to be kept at the Kedah State Library.. His collection included books and notes on Malay history and language, culture and arts; photographs; newspaper cuttings; and other items of significance to the Malay world were handed to the. A handing over ceremony was held on 24 January 1988 in conjunction with H.R.H the Sultan of Kedah's birthday.

A private collection is made up of various kinds and forms of materials such as correspondences, diaries, notes on paper, photographs and others. These items would have been collected based on an individual's interest and/or his involvement in specialised fields. In Malaysia, it is a common practice for individuals to contribute their private collection to the various libraries. Pendeta Za'ba contributed his valuable collection to the University of Malaya Library. In 1982, writer Harun Aminurashid handed 2,956 items to Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. In Europe, libraries becomes renown if they are able to house a Malay manuscript collection. By handing over private collections to institutions, these individuals hope that the public can benefit from them. Researchers may find the forms or contents of these private collections interesting. The fate of these valuable materials would be uncertain if they are kept by the owners or their descendants.

The Ismail Hussein Collection has the largest collection on Malay world in the Malay archipelago. Ismail Hussein is a Professor of Malay studies at Universiti Kebangsaan is a champion in his efforts to bring back the fame and glory of the Malay civilization. His effort in collecting materials and conducting various researches would help revive the civilization which has diminished. His idea of the Malay world extends geographically to Pasca Island in the South, Madagascar in the west and Taiwan in the east. The vision and mission of ismail Hussein can be seen in his rich private collection which he had accumulated over almost 30 years. He has been acquiring them since his student days in the University of Malaya in Singapore (1955-1959) and then at Leiden University in Holland (1961-1964). He continued collecting as a lecturer at Universiti Malaya since 1960 and especially so when he became aProfessor of Malay Literature from1971 till now. He is also is the Head of the Gabungan Penulis Nasional or GAPENA from 1960 till now. His close associates claimed that he is an avid reader and seldom spends most of his time

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reading. He not only reads but buys books as well and he bought a lot of books when he was studying in London. His position as the Head of GAPENA for 19 years has contributed to his vast collection of valuable files and seminar papers.

The specialty of his collection is in the variety of the forms and contents of the material. Besides books on Malay language and literature collected from Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam, Pattani, Sri Lanka, Holland and Europe, there are books in other languages such as Dutch, French, Russian, German about the Malay language, literature and culture. The collection's strength is also in its number of theses on the Malay language and literature. Apart from that, the collection also has rare books, manuscripts, transcriptions, prints, stenciled materials, souvenir programs, annual reports, newspaper cuttings and photographs. The Kedah State Government is indeed very proud to be the keepers of this collection.

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